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Lucia A Keegan 08/17/2006 10:10:37 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005512

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Middle East - Lebanon - Hezbollah -  
Iran  
PARIS - Wednesday, August 16, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Middle East - Lebanon - Hezbollah - Iran

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Chinese and Korean irritation at Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to a Japanese war memorial - where war criminals among those honored - leads in both Le Figaro and Liberation today. Saturation coverage of issues affecting post-conflict Lebanon continues in the electronic media and with double page spreads in both Le Figaro and Liberation. The mandate and composition of the UN peacekeeping force, expected to be led by France, and the roles of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah - especially during the period of Lebanese reconstruction - are the major stories. (See Part C)

Diplomacy is much in the news and Foreign Ministers seem to be

everywhere. French FM Douste-Blazy is in Lebanon today apparently to underscore Lebanon's responsibility for disarming Hezbollah. Foreign Minister is expected to speak about Hezbollah's victory during his visit to Algeria today. Israeli FM Tzipi Livni will be meeting with UNSYG Annan in New York today. German FM Steinmeyer cancelled a planned visit to Damascus after hearing about Bashar al-Assad's provocative speech yesterday.

Le Parisien titles its report "The Last Word Rests with the Diplomats." The article says peace is "fragile," with Iran threatening to retaliate against Israeli or U.S. attacks. FM Douste-Blazy is in Beirut to discuss the deployment of an international force, which Le Parisien says could operate under French command.

Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, a guest on FR2 television last evening, said that "France had worked hard for peace in Lebanon and is now satisfied with the new hope for peace in the region, as hope lies solely in diplomacy." He also mentioned that France could lead the international force, "but that the decision remained in the hands of the President."

Le Figaro characterizes Bachar al-Assad's speech as "a discourse of war" in which he announces a "New Middle East" "defined by Hezbollah" to stand as "a rival of America's 'Greater Middle East.'" There are extensive quotes from the speech, including criticism of the Bush Administration, "which believes only in preventive war, not peace." France is also criticized, says the reporter, "for having initiated the UN resolution on Syria." But the journalist writes that "under these attacks, what can be perceived are Damascus's fears and concerns about regional boundaries."

Liberation and Le Figaro, which notes that some 14, 000 British citizens convert to Islam every year, 60% of them women, report on accusations made in the British press that the British government is proceeding with 'profiling' methods when screening travelers at airports. Speaking about the foiled terrorist attempts during his televised interview, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy said the attacks in London, "should be taken seriously" and added that the "terrorist threat in France remained high and permanent." He also mentioned that a meeting between the British, German and French Interior Ministers would take place on Wednesday to "discuss the terrorist threat in Europe and to harmonize European policies."

As part of its series on "born again" cities around the world, Le Figaro looks at Kabul. Correspondent Adrien Jaulmes, for whom Embassy Paris helped facilitate interviews in Afghanistan, drafts an optimistic portrait of a "prosperous city."

#### (C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

##### "Frightening Hezbollah"

Yves Threard in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/16): "The support of Hezbollah by returning Lebanese is indeed frightening, as is the tone of Nasrallah's victory speech in which he hailed the victory of the 'anti-Zionist resistance.' Just as frightening are the reaction of Iran's officials and the nature of Al-Assad's speech... Although the weapons have been put down, hope has not returned: on the contrary... Western democracies carry their own responsibilities for having allowed the Iranian revolution to take place... and for having fraternized with Saddam Hussein's Iraq ... as well as having tolerated the rise of fundamentalism... The result stands before our eyes, personified by Hezbollah, an organization which looks like a fascist movement: few are the western leaders who acknowledge this... The true threat comes from Iran more than the birth of a 'Shia crescent.' Lebanon paid the price of our silence. It is time we engaged and demanded the disarmament of the militia... Otherwise Iran will feel it has a free rein."

##### "French Diplomacy to the Rescue"

Hubert Coudurier in regional Le Telegramme (08/16): "Philippe Douste-Blazy is back in Beirut... where Condoleezza Rice is unwelcome. France is imposing itself in the Middle East peace process as it tries to adopt a balanced stance between the American and Israeli interests on one hand, and the interests of Lebanon and its two cumbersome tutors, Damascus and Tehran... This is why Douste-Blazy is cautious and is insisting on adding Muslim soldiers to the French and other western soldiers of the international

force... The Foreign Minister's previous remarks about Iran playing a stabilizing role elicited a certain degree of irony among his detractors. Nevertheless, with President Chirac having decided to keep Syria out of the equation... France has no choice, if it wants to play its score, but to do it through a Paris-Tehran axis. This is forcing Douste-Blazy to soften his initial remarks about Iran's nuclear ambitions, which were deemed too pro-Atlantist."

#### "The U.S. Worried About Iran's Strategic Advantage"

Guillemette Faure in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/16): "The U.S. is worried about the strategic advantage which Iran has gained from the conflict... U.S. military experts are astounded at Hezbollah's resistance, which they compare to what they are facing in Iraq... While the White House is trying to portray the cessation of hostilities in a positive light for Israel, Henri Berkley, formerly of the State Department said it was not realistic on the part of the U.S. to expect a complete victory from Israel... Others say that America's concern is not only based on the direct threat which Hezbollah holds over Lebanon and Israel, but on the strategic advantage that Hezbollah provides for Iran. Meanwhile President Bush insisted that Lebanon and Iraq are the two fronts of the same war, the war against terrorism aided by Iran."

#### "Lebanon and Gaza: Two Different Stories"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (08/16): "The situation in Lebanon cannot be compared to the one in Gaza. What isn't working in Gaza is Israel's unilateral pullout. The Lebanese issue is different: Israel has no conflict with Lebanon, but with Lebanon's armed party, Hezbollah. Israel's withdrawal (from Lebanon) in 2000 was negotiated... and Hezbollah has violated the terms of the UN resolution. The first case requires a resumption of talks with the Palestinians. The second requires the end of the war and disarming Hezbollah. The withdrawals are not at issue here."

#### "The Peoples' Voice"

Dominique Quinio in Catholic La Croix (08/16): "The public debate in Israel is telling: Nobody can ignore what the war will have cost, and everybody can see that, for a majority of Israelis, their army did not achieve its goals... The ceasefire's ramifications for Lebanese opinion are more difficult to determine. But one thing is certain: military options lead to an impasse... They do not eliminate the enemy; they reinforce him." HOFMANN